

Promoting Lifelong Physical Activity

An Overview

Young people can build healthy bodies and establish healthy lifestyles by including physical activity in their daily lives. However, many young people are not physically active on a regular basis, and physical activity declines dramatically during adolescence. School and community programs can help young people get active and stay active.

BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence



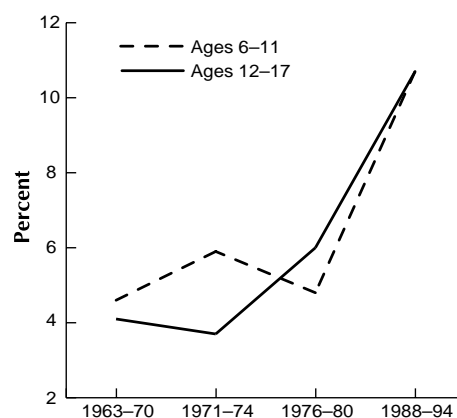
- Improves strength and endurance.
- Helps build healthy bones and muscles.
- Helps control weight.
- Reduces anxiety and stress and increases self-esteem.
- May improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

In addition, young people say they like physical activity because it is fun; they do it with friends; and it helps them learn skills, stay in shape, and look better.

CONSEQUENCES OF PHYSICAL INACTIVITY

- The percentage of young people who are overweight has almost doubled in the past 20 years.
- Inactivity and poor diet cause at least 300,000 deaths a year in the United States. Only tobacco use causes more preventable deaths.
- Adults who are less active are at greater risk of dying of heart disease and developing diabetes, colon cancer, and high blood pressure.

Percentage of Young People
Who Are Overweight*



*Overweight defined by the age- and sex-specific 95th percentile of body mass index (1963-70 data).
Source: Troiano RP, Flegal KM. *Pediatrics* 1998;101(3):497-504.



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

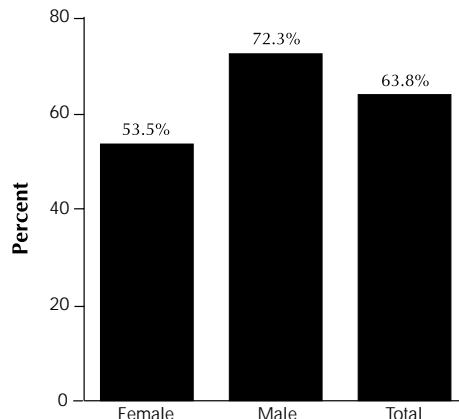
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PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

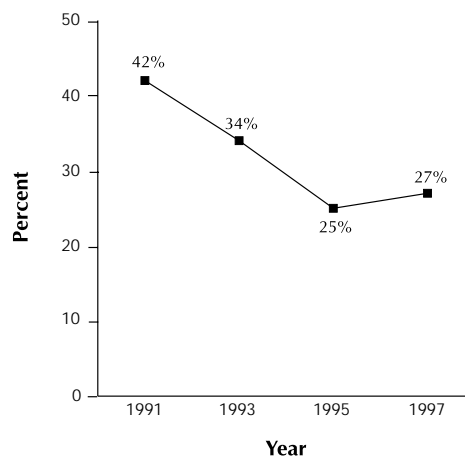
- Almost half of young people aged 12–21 and more than a third of high school students do not participate in vigorous physical activity on a regular basis.
- Seventy-three percent of 9th graders participate in vigorous physical activity on a regular basis, compared with only 58% of 12th graders.
- Daily participation in physical education classes by high school students dropped from 42% in 1991 to 27% in 1997.
- The time students spend being active in physical education classes is decreasing; among high school students enrolled in a physical education class, the percentage who were active for at least 20 minutes during an average class dropped from 81% in 1991 to 74% in 1997.

Percentage of High School Students Who Participate in Vigorous Physical Activity,* by Sex



*Activities that caused sweating and hard breathing for at least 20 minutes on 3 or more of the 7 days preceding the survey.
Source: CDC, National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1997.

Percentage of High School Students Who Attended Physical Education Classes Daily, 1991–1997



Source: CDC, National Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

HOW MUCH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DO YOUNG PEOPLE NEED?

Everyone can benefit from a moderate amount of physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. Young people should select activities they enjoy that fit into their daily lives. Examples of moderate activity include



- Walking 2 miles in 30 minutes or running 1½ miles in 15 minutes.
- Bicycling 5 miles in 30 minutes or 4 miles in 15 minutes.
- Dancing fast for 30 minutes or jumping rope for 15 minutes.
- Playing basketball for 15–20 minutes or volleyball for 45 minutes.

Increasing the frequency, time, or intensity of physical activity can bring even more health benefits—up to a point. Too much physical activity can lead to injuries and other health problems.

CDC's Guidelines for Promoting Lifelong Physical Activity

CDC's Guidelines for School and Community Programs to Promote Lifelong Physical Activity Among Young People were developed in collaboration with experts from other federal agencies, state agencies, universities, voluntary organizations, and professional associations. They are based on an extensive review of research and practice.

KEY PRINCIPLES

The guidelines state that physical activity programs for young people are most likely to be effective when they

- Emphasize enjoyable participation in physical activities that are easily done throughout life.
- Offer a diverse range of noncompetitive and competitive activities appropriate for different ages and abilities.
- Give young people the skills and confidence they need to be physically active.
- Promote physical activity through all components of a coordinated school health program and develop links between school and community programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Policy

Establish policies that promote enjoyable, lifelong physical activity.

- Schools should require daily physical education and comprehensive health education (including lessons on physical activity) in grades K–12.
- Schools and community organizations should provide adequate funding, equipment, and supervision for programs that meet the needs and interests of all students.

2 Environment

Provide physical and social environments that encourage and enable young people to engage in safe and enjoyable physical activity.

- Provide access to safe spaces and facilities and implement measures to prevent activity-related injuries and illnesses.
- Provide school time, such as recess, for unstructured physical activity, such as jumping rope.
- Discourage the use or withholding of physical activity as punishment.
- Provide health promotion programs for school faculty and staff.

3 Physical Education Curricula and Instruction

Implement sequential physical education curricula and instruction in grades K–12 that

- Emphasize enjoyable participation in lifetime physical activities such as walking and dancing, not just competitive sports.
- Help students develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to adopt and maintain a physically active lifestyle.
- Follow the National Standards for Physical Education.
- Keep students active for most of class time.

4 Health Education Curricula and Instruction

Implement health education curricula and instruction that

- Feature active learning strategies and follow the National Health Education Standards.
- Help students develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

5 Extracurricular Activities

Provide extracurricular physical activity programs that offer diverse, developmentally appropriate activities—both noncompetitive and competitive—for all students.

6 Family Involvement

Encourage parents and guardians to support their children's participation in physical activity, to be physically active role models, and to include physical activity in family events.

7 Training

Provide training to enable teachers, coaches, recreation and health care staff, and other school and community personnel to promote enjoyable, lifelong physical activity among young people.

8 Health Services

Assess the physical activity patterns of young people, refer them to appropriate physical activity programs, and advocate for physical activity instruction and programs for young people.

9 Community Programs

Provide a range of developmentally appropriate community sports and recreation programs that are attractive to all young people.

10 Evaluation

Regularly evaluate physical activity instruction, programs, and facilities.

This brochure and CDC's *Guidelines for School and Community Programs to Promote Lifelong Physical Activity Among Young People* can be reproduced and adapted without permission. Copies of the guidelines can be downloaded from the Internet at <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/physact.htm>. Print copies are available from CDC, Division of Adolescent and School Health, ATTN: Resource Room, 4770 Buford Highway, NE, Mailstop K-32, Atlanta, GA 30341-3717; e-mail: ccdinfo@cdc.gov; phone: (770) 488-3168; fax: (888) 282-7681. CDC's Division of Adolescent and School Health also distributes guidelines for school health programs on preventing the spread of AIDS, promoting lifelong healthy eating, and preventing tobacco use and addiction.